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Video: 'Mass Casualty Incident' as Yeshiva Bus Slams Into New York Home, 14 Children Hospitalized
By - Fantine Gardinier

More than a dozen children were hospitalized on Monday after their school bus flew off the road and slammed into a house in a New York suburb.

The accident occurred in New Hempstead, a suburb of New York City with a large Hasidic Jewish community. According to local media reports, the bus slammed into two parked cars while attempting to navigate a curve. The bus and at least one of the cars flew down a hill and into the corner of a house.

Photos from the crash scene showed the front of the bus mangled, one of the cars upside down, and several feet of the house crumpled from the impact.

A second car can be seen crushed against several trees, further up the hill.

Orange and County Fires described the crash as a "mass casualty incident." The bus was carrying 22 people, most of them children. Fourteen people were sent to area hospitals with injuries, including five sent to trauma centers, two of whom are in serious condition, and one of whom is reportedly receiving brain surgery.

Officials offered no immediate explanations for the crash, and did not state if there had been an arrest.

The bus was later confirmed to be operated by the Ribnitzer schools. New York's large Hasidic Jewish community, who speak primarily Yiddish, operate their own private schools. In New York City, [recent investigations have revealed](#) widespread corruption in the Hasidic schools due to officials exploiting city programs to garner extra funds. At the same time, Hasidic students are chronically underperforming on key academic subjects.

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Unequal Franco-American Relationship Will Survive the Inflation Reduction Act, Experts Say
By - Fantine Gardinier

During a visit to Washington, DC, on Thursday, French President Emmanuel Macron said France and the United States had "decided to synchronize our agendas," discussing key points of cooperation and conflict, including NATO military support for Ukraine and a new American law that threatens European industry.

Ahead of the meeting, [Macron criticized](#) the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), a US law passed in August that provides subsidies for American industries, calling it "super-aggressive" and would

increase Europe's economic problems. The IRA has been touted by the White House as one of Biden's most important legislative victories in his two years in office.

Dr. Paul Craig Roberts, an American economist and author who was assistant secretary of the Treasury in the Reagan Administration and associate editor of the Wall Street Journal, told Sputnik on Thursday that "Macron is in Washington to try to find out if Washington will adjust its policies so that Europe can remain industrialized. Cut off from energy, Europe is not capable of conducting a trade war with Washington."

"Official reasons given for meetings between governments are often screens to hide the real issues. Macron is in Washington because it has dawned on Europeans that the combination of Washington's 'Russian' sanctions with Washington's 'Inflation Reduction Act' means the demise of European industry and the jobs, incomes, and tax base that are associated with it," he noted. "Washington's sanctions have had little effect on Russia but are devastating Europe. Business and trade relationships between Europe and Russia have been shattered. Russian energy flows to Europe have been essentially turned off, leaving Europe short of energy for her industries. How severe and long lasting this will be remains to be seen. The Inflation Reduction Act subsidizes manufacturers that produce within the US, thus giving the US competitive advantage over Europe."

However, Dr. Roslyn Fuller, director of the non-profit think tank Solonian Democracy Institute and the author of the book "Beasts and Gods: How Democracy Changed Its Meaning and Lost Its Purpose," said such disputes are fairly normal and don't threaten the Franco-American relationship.

"The EU and US have had many trade disputes in the past, for example the beef hormone dispute, the Boeing/Airbus dispute (over subsidies) to name just a few," she noted.

"The US and EU are the most prolific instigators of WTO trade dispute settlement proceedings. It's fairly normal for states to try to protect their industry (after all, this is one of their key jobs) and for others to complain if they feel that they are bending the rules. It would be unnatural for everyone to always get along and agree on these points," Fuller said.

"Both politicians addressed this topic in their remarks, stating that they would work harder to align on this point and find ways to cooperate to everyone's benefit going forward. Biden definitely seemed quite accommodating on this point during the conference, referring to 'tweaks' that could be made and emphasizing several times that the USA did not wish to achieve supply chain independence at the expense of Europe."

"I think the US's primary goal has been to break European ties with Russia, particularly over energy," she added.

"The US definitely cares about Europe, and France is the sole EU member that is a nuclear power and on the United Nations Security Council," she said.

"Biden and Macron are both neoliberal politicians who view themselves as bulwarks against right-wing populism. Neither the USA nor Biden wants to be dealing with the National Rally in power in France and in the various international institutions, so Macron, who managed to win centrist electoral victories in France during times of great upheaval is always going to be someone the US has to care about."

Roberts agreed, but cast Europe in a subservient role, noting that "NATO is a means of Washington control."

"Except for [France under Charles de Gaulle](#), Western European governments and the UK have been Washington's puppets since 1945. With the movement of NATO to Russia's border, Eastern Europe, with the exception of Hungary, are also Washington's puppets. European politicians are accustomed to putting Washington's interests above those of their own populations. It is difficult to get out of a subservient relationship," he said.

"NATO is a means of Washington control. There are no independent European policies toward the conflict in Ukraine. Washington's policy is Europe's policy. Washington's policy is not to reach agreement on a settlement. Washington's policy is to use Ukraine - to Ukraine's destruction - against Russia. Instead of using sufficient force to quickly end the conflict, the Kremlin has played into Washington's hands. Washington intends to keep the conflict going as long as [Russian President Vladimir] Putin allows, thus maximizing the propaganda that blackens Russia's name and in hopes of causing a rise of internal opposition in Russia against Putin."

Fuller agreed, and pointed out that the two Western industries that have profited the most from the conflict in Ukraine are the energy industry and the weapons industry.

"The military-industrial complex is such that it is 'good for business' to supply arms around the world and get rid of the old inventory," Fuller said. She noted that NATO has adopted a "long war" strategy "that drains resources and leads to civil dissatisfaction" in Russia.

"They don't have a huge incentive to negotiate," Fuller said of NATO. "I'm not saying this could never happen, perhaps at some point they might decide to cut their losses and include western Ukraine in the EU, and accept this as a consolation prize, but at the moment there is a tantalizing prospect of causing upheaval in Russia itself, provided they can inflict enough damage, and even the chance of that will be enough to keep a lot of people in Washington committed to the war."

France, she said, has gone along with this despite its typical hesitancy toward war, because Paris also hopes to curb Russian gains in Africa, where several former French colonies have looked to Moscow to help solve their problems with chronic insurgencies. In addition, the French public largely supports their government's support for Kiev, "so, again, there is no pressing reason to stop this strategy."

"If the arms and energy sectors are happy and the population is basically happy (at least with the war effort, not with high energy costs), they have no reason to change strategy. It should also be mentioned that the winter in Europe has thus far been much milder than expected and this has helped to contain fears over energy costs immensely," Fuller said.

"This seemed to come through in the remarks of both politicians. In his initial remarks, Biden was extremely strident on Ukraine, repeatedly using words like 'brutal' and 'barbarous' and presenting a very uncompromising front, while Macron, although agreeing with this general position, did say that France would support peace on terms agreed by the Ukrainians themselves. So there is that support, but it isn't quite as uncompromising as the American position. That being said, towards the end of the conference Biden did say that he would be prepared to negotiate with Putin under the right circumstances, which was a little at odds with the rhetoric in his earlier remarks."

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Likud Reaches Key Deal Giving Religious Zionism Control Over Finance Ministry, West Bank Settlements

By - Fantine Gardinier

Fears that Israel's designated prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, would be unable to form a coalition majority after elections last month have been allayed, as news broke on Wednesday that Likud had reached a deal with Religious Zionism (Tkuma), a far-right party key to Netanyahu's majority.

Arrival at the deal means [Netanyahu's fragile coalition](#) will likely survive. Religious Zionism's Bezalel Smotrich and Itamar Ben-Gvir of Otzma Yehudit both made substantial demands, threatening to leave the alliance if they weren't met.

Under the terms of the deal, Religious Zionism will gain control over parts of the Israeli finance ministry for two years, as well as Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT), the part of the defense ministry responsible for Jewish settlements in the West Bank, according to Israeli media.

Power will be shared in both cases, with Smotrich sharing the finance ministry with Aryeh Deri, leader of the Sephardi Haredi party Shas.

Smotrich's party will also get control over the Constitution, Law and Justice Committee in the Knesset, giving them influence over judicial reforms, which are high on the party's agenda.

Ben-Gvir, Smotrich's close ally, has also used his leverage over the coalition's viability to win key government appointments, including becoming Minister of Public Security.

The outgoing Public Security Minister, Omer Barlev, has sharply criticized his successor's political agenda, warning that his anti-Arab policies could spark a harsh reaction from Palestinians.

"If there is a change in the status quo on the Temple Mount there will be a third intifada," Barlev said on Thursday, referring to two previous Palestinian uprisings in the 1990s and 2000s.

Ben-Gvir has publicly called for the Muslim holy sites there, including the Dome of the Rock, to be leveled.

"This is clear to me and also to Netanyahu, but we have seen that his considerations are frequently personal," he added.

Since the West Bank and East Jerusalem were seized by Israeli forces in the 1967 Six-Day War, Jewish settlement there have steadily expanded, with Palestinian-Arab families being evicted in the process, although Jews remain the minority in both territories. Israel extends the benefits and protections of citizenship to those settlers, but not to the Palestinians there, prompting [comparisons with the Apartheid](#) system of white supremacy that prevailed in South Africa before 1994. The United Nations has denounced Israeli control over the territories as illegal.

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Crisis Averted: US Congress Votes to Impose Labor Deal for Rail Workers, Measure Heads to Biden

During a meeting with French President Emmanuel Macron, US President Joe Biden defended the labor agreement, noting that "what was negotiated was so much better than anything they ever had."

The US Senate passed a resolution on Thursday to avert a nationwide rail strike that had the potential of costing the US billions of dollars if not prevented. The measure now heads to US President Joe Biden's desk for his signature.

The resolution cleared the congressional chamber with a 80-15 vote, after having earlier passed in the House with a 290-137 vote.

Moments before the final vote was held, the Thursday call saw senators reject a separate resolution that sought to guarantee seven days' worth of paid sick leave annually for all rail workers as part of the labor deal. The amendment, which failed with a 52-43 vote in the Senate, had cleared the lower congressional chamber.

Senate lawmakers managed to advance the piece of legislation just eight days before workers were set to go on a nationwide strike on December 9, a move that would have had caused serious setbacks to the US economy. Earlier figures suggested that a rail strike would have come at a daily economic loss of \$2 billion.

The legislation effectively enacts new contracts that will provide rail workers with a 24% pay increase over a period of five years through 2024, extra paid off time and immediate payouts that will average some \$11,000. The tentative labor deal also provides improved health care benefits.

Earlier this week, Biden called on congressional lawmakers to act quickly and "immediately" send a measure to avert the potential crisis, even though he was initially hesitant to override a vote against the contract by unions opposing the deal.

"As a proud pro-labor president, I am reluctant to override the ratification procedures and the views of those who voted against the agreement," Biden said. "But in this case - where the economic impact of a shutdown would hurt millions of other working people and families - I believe Congress must use its powers to adopt this deal."

The Association of American Railroads earlier detailed that four of the 12 labor unions had opposed the labor agreement. Opposition to the deal centered around the lack of paid personal/medical leave for workers.

However, despite the congressional passage, concerns remain that some worker may quit after being given backpay. Jeremy Ferguson, president rail union SMART-TD, informed CNBC that talk was rampant on the "possibility."

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Idaho College Murders: Investigators Backtrack on Whether Four Students Were Targeted
By - Mary Manley

In the early hours of November 13 four University of Idaho students were stabbed to death in an off-campus house in the college town of Moscow. The victims were Kaylee Goncalves, 21, Madison Mogen, 21, Xana Kernodle, 20, and Kernodle's boyfriend, Ethan Chapin, 20.

Weeks following the brutal murders of four Idaho University students, police have yet to release the names of any suspects, and as local, state and federal law enforcement continue to investigate who is responsible for the murders, they have backtracked on some of their past statements relating to the case.

US media recently [reported](#) that officials investigating the case have been indecisive on whether or not the murder was an "isolated attack," or if the residence itself was a target of the attack. On Thursday, in their most recent statement, Idaho State Police spokesman Aaron Snell told reporters: "We remain consistent in our belief that this was indeed a targeted attack but have not concluded if the target was the residence or its occupants."

That statement contradicts officials' earlier statement on November 15, when Moscow police had said the attack was believed to be isolated and targeted, and that there was no "imminent threat to the community at large."

Investigators have not identified a suspect nor a murder weapon—which is believed to be a large fixed-blade knife based on autopsy reports—but thus far they have conducted 150 interviews and are reviewing 500 digital media submissions as well as 1,000 tips. Authorities have not ruled out the possibility the murders were conducted by more than one person.

On Wednesday, parents of the victims as well as students and faculty of the University of Idaho took part in a vigil to remember and honor the four victims: [Goncalves](#) was a senior general studies major and a member of the Alpha Phi sorority, Mogen and Kernodle were both marketing majors who were members of the Pi Beta Phi. Chapin was a freshman and a member of the Sigma Chi fraternity, and was majoring in recreation, sport, and tourism management.

"It's hard that we are without these four beautiful kids with us tonight," said Stacy [Chapin](#), mother of one of the victims.

"We're going to get our justice. We're going to figure this stuff out," Steven Goncalves, Kaylee's father, said at the ceremony at the university in Moscow, Idaho. "This community deserves that." "They're kind of just telling me that they can't tell me much, which is frustrating," Goncalves, who says he is desperate for information about his daughter's murder, told reporters earlier.

"This is a criminal investigation so we can't throw all of our cards on the table and tell everybody everything that we have," Aaron Snell, communications director for the Idaho State Police, told an American [news outlet](#) on Tuesday.

Police have ruled out several people who were tied to the victims the night of the stabbings.

There were also two other roommates at home the night the four students were murdered, neither were injured and they are not believed to be involved in the crime, police said. One of the roommates had made a 911 call at around noon after she believed one of the victims was unconscious.

Chapin and Kernodle had been at a campus party the night before the attack, while Mogen and Goncalves were seen at a food truck at around 1:40 a.m. local time, which was recorded on a video livestream.

The stab wounds were "extensive," said Latah County Coroner Cathy Mabbutt, who added that the students were likely sleeping when the attacks began.

There was no sign of forced entry or damage to the home of the four college students. Two of the students' bodies were found on the second floor of the house and the other two were found on the third floor. Goncalves' father said that his daughter and Mogen, who were best friends since childhood, died in bed [together](#).

Idaho Governor Brad Little has directed \$1 million towards the investigation in emergency funds, Moscow police said. The University of Idaho, which started Thanksgiving break just days after the four students were killed, has allowed students to finish the semester remotely if they are fearful of their safety.

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'So Incredibly Dangerous': Ye Stuns Netizens After Praising Hitler in Infowars Interview
By - Mary Manley

The 45-year-old musician torched his career after spewing antisemitic remarks across social media and in interviews. The rapper shared a tweet on his social media page in early October, saying he was going to go "death con 3 [defcon] On JEWISH PEOPLE" which was removed. However, his account was recently reinstated after Elon Musk purchased Twitter.

Ye, the artist formerly known as Kanye West, came under fire on Thursday after doubling down on antisemitic comments that also saw the musician give praise to Adolf Hitler while appearing on the Infowars program with host Alex Jones.

The musician appeared on the program sporting a fully hooded mask and carrying a bottle of Yoo-hoo and a insect net. Alongside him was Nick Fuentes, an outspoken white supremacist who recently made headline news after dining with former President Donald Trump.

"You're not a Nazi, you don't deserve to be called that and demonized," Jones told Ye.

"Well, I see good things about Hitler also, I love everyone and Jewish people are not going to tell me, 'You can love us, and you can love what we're doing to you with the contracts, and you can love what we're pushing with the pornography', but this guy that invented highways, invented the very microphone that I used as a musician, you can't say out loud that this person never did anything good and I'm done with that. I'm done with the classifications. Every human being has something of value that they brought to the table, especially Hitler," responded [West](#). Just as the show headed to commercial break, Ye told Jones that he "likes" Hitler. The comment came in response to Jones' remark that he has a "Hitler fetish."

Jones has dealt with his own critical media coverage this year when he was sued by the parents of Sandy Hook shooting victims for defamation after he encourage conspiracy theories insinuating that the 2012 shooting was a hoax. Jones has been ordered to pay \$49 million after the judge in the case opted not to apply the \$750,000 state cap because what Jones had done was "horrible."

As Jones appeared to push back against Ye's statements that there were "a lot of things" he "loved" about the Hitler, the appearance also saw the artist at one point attempting to do prop comedy with a Yoo-hoo bottle and an insect net he referred to as Netanyahu, in reference to Israeli figure Benjamin Netanyahu.

Shortly after the interview streamed, social media were quick to react to the chaotic interview, some even pointing out their own shock to seeing Jones appearing uncomfortable during the segment.

One Twitter [user](#) wrote: "Honestly I'm not sure what to do here. I cannot tell you how unbelievably antisemitic this Kanye West Infowars interview is."

Some users on the social media site chose to make light of the dark interview, with one user joking: "He's about to change his name to Yedolf" in reference to West's celebrity name "Ye". "People are gonna joke about Kanye. People are gonna blame his mental health," warned Twitter user @JoshuaPHilll, referencing West's struggles with bipolar [disorder](#). "But the truth is that he's normalizing Nazism for a whole lot of people. I know that word is overused but folks will be googling Hitler tonight. It's so incredibly dangerous."

The Republican Jewish [Coalition](#) condemned Thursday's interview, calling the three men "a disgusting triumvirate of conspiracy theorists, Holocaust deniers, and anti-Semites."

"Given his praise of Hitler, it can't be overstated that Kanye West is a vile, repellent bigot who has targeted the Jewish community with threats and Nazi-style defamation," a statement from the coalition said. "Conservatives who have mistakenly indulged Kanye West must make it clear that he is a pariah. Enough is enough."

In the wake of the interview, the Republican House Judiciary Committee also appeared to remove a viral tweet it issued in October that read: "Kanye. Elon. Trump."

No stranger to controversy, Ye more recently began making headlines in mid-October after multiple companies moved to split ties with him following earlier antisemitic remarks. Alternative social media platform Parler also reiterated Thursday that a deal for Ye to purchase the site had been terminated in mid-November.

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Lava Flow in Hawaii Threatens Health of Residents & Island's Main Highway
By - Mary Manley

Mauna Loa is the world's largest active volcano and makes up 51% of the Hawai'i Island and stands 13,681 feet above sea level and 30,000 feet from the bottom of the sea. According to the National Park Service, the volcano has erupted 34 times since 1843, and on Sunday the volcano erupted for the first time in 38 years.

On [Sunday](#) at around 11:30 p.m., the Mauna Loa volcano erupted for the first time in 38 years. Lava which shot up in fountains that measured 148 feet in height has been crawling towards the Daniel K. Inouye Highway, and was reported to be just 3.6 miles away from the island's fastest route on Thursday morning. The United States Geological Survey (USGS) said it would take a minimum of two days for the lava to reach the road.

The highway is a major route that runs through the saddle region between Mauna Loa and Maunakea, and allows thousands of people to travel each day between the east and west sides of Hawai'i.

"Of course, [Daniel K. Inouye Highway] is a very important state highway," said Talmadge [Magno](#), the Hawai'i County Civil Defense administrator, during a Wednesday conference. Magno added that any interruption to that highway would force residents to use Highways 11 and 19 and would most likely result in an increase traffic.

Currently, the Hawai'i Department of Transportation is monitoring the lava's impact and will need to provide commuters with a six-hour notice before shutting down the highway if the lava impedes the bypass.

"It's a hassle to drive all the way around the island," said Emmanuel Carrasco [Escalante](#), a landscape worker, who told an American news outlet that he would have to change his commute if the highway shuts down. "If the road closes, that would add almost two hours, more gas, and more miles so hopefully it (lava) doesn't cross that road."

Officials added that because the lava is flowing at a slow rate, the fastest that it could reach the highway would be on Friday.

"We expect it will probably take longer than that," said Ken Hon, the Hawaiian Volcano Observatory scientist-in-charge. "As the lava flow spreads out, it will probably interfere with its own progress and we expect it to slow down some from that previous rate. So we're looking at about two days out at the earliest that it might actually hit the Saddle Road at this point."

The USGS reported on Thursday that it could even take up to a week before the lava reaches the highway, based on an estimate conducted by their researchers.

"Note, we just got a revised estimate based upon the flow-front location measured by our team on the ground," the [USGS tweeted](#). "Because of the spreading flow front and flat topography, it could be a week before it intersects the road."

Another volcano, one which is just 21 miles from Mauna Loa, is erupting in Hawai'i; however, the Kilauea volcano has been erupting since last year. Since Kilauea's activity is now coinciding with Mauna Loa, state officials are warning of possible health issues such as volcanic smog which includes "ash in the air, and levels of sulfur dioxide to increase and fluctuate in various areas of the state," according to the state's health department.

"You're talking hydrogen fluoride, hydrogen sulfide, carbon dioxide. These are all gasses that are really not fun for average folks to breathe in, let alone if you have any sort of respiratory issue," said volcanologist Jess Phoenix.

Despite the dangerous air conditions, Governor David Ige told reporters on [Wednesday](#) that it is safe to visit the island, but he has wanted visitors and residents to not stop on the highway if they wish to sightsee the volcanic lava as it could cause accidents.

"The concern is about dangerous gasses from the fissures. And the most dangerous is sulfur dioxide," Ige said Wednesday, who is issuing an Emergency [Proclamation](#) for the eruption.

"Observing the volcano should occur at a distance. It's not safe to get up close."

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Video: US Navy Ships Nearly Collide in California's San Diego Bay
By - Mary Manley

On Tuesday morning, two United States Navy ships nearly collided in the San Diego Bay. An investigation is now underway as officials are trying to piece together why the USS Momsen and USS Harpers Ferry narrowly avoided each other in the bay.

A naval [investigation](#) is underway after the guided-missile destroyer USS Momsen and the dock landing ship USS Harpers Ferry nearly collided in the San Diego Bay on Tuesday.

Crew members can be heard communicating with each other in order to avoid the collision on footage posted to Twitter by @SanDiegoWebCam along with the caption: "Warship Chicken in San Diego Bay."

The USS [Momsen](#), which is 544-feet long can be seen approaching the 610-foot USS Harpers Ferry which is exiting the dock. The incident took place between Naval Base Point Loma and Naval Air Station North.

The USS Momsen is stationed in Everett, Washington, whereas the USS Harpers Ferry is stationed in San Diego, California.

The ships were able to narrowly slip past each other and no crew members were injured during the incident. The ships were able to get to safe positions, said US 3rd Fleet spokesman Lt. Samuel Boyle.

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Canada to Restore, Renovate Sherbrooke Reservists' Armouries - Defense Department

WASHINGTON, December 2 (Sputnik) - Canada's Department of National Defense will restore the Sherbrooke reservists' William Street Armoury and renovate the Colonel-Gaëtan-Côté Armoury, also known as the Belvédère Street Armoury, according to a release Friday.

"Ensuring reservists in Sherbrooke have the modern infrastructure they need to train and operate effectively is critically important for the future of our Canadian Armed Forces," Minister of National Defense Anita Anand said in a release. "I also recognize that the Belvédère and William Street Armouries have significant historical value to people in the region."

Following an extensive evaluation of primary reserve infrastructure in the region, including various studies and public consultation, the Department of National Defense will start a recapitalization project to renovate the Belvédère Street Armoury. The project is expected to be tendered for design after a full assessment of reservists' needs is completed, and the necessary project approvals are obtained.

The significance of the William Street Armoury to the Sherbrooke community was reaffirmed by community members during public consultations that were held by the Department of National Defence earlier this year. The department will retain the services of heritage consultants and work closely with the City of Sherbrooke to restore the William Street Armoury in a manner that preserves its historical value. After a full assessment of the needs of reservists, and engagement with heritage experts, a plan to restore the William Street Armoury, in consultation with stakeholders, will be created.

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US November Jobs Growth More Than 30% Over Forecast, Proving Tough Fight Against Inflation

(Changes headline; adds details, comments and context in paras 5-11)

WASHINGTON, December 2 (Sputnik) - The United States added 263,000 jobs in November, the Labor Department said Friday, reporting the smallest employment growth in a month since February 2021 but still more than 30% above forecast levels that proved the tough job the country had in cooling a runaway jobs market that was feeding inflation.

The so-called non-farm payrolls growth for last month came in a shade higher than October's 261,000 jobs, and strongly above the 200,000 forecast by economists. The unemployment rate, however, remained unchanged at 3.7%. The Federal Reserve defines a jobless rate of 4% or below as maximum employment.

The Fed aims to ensure optimum job opportunities for Americans while keeping inflation at or around 2% per annum. While it has done exceedingly well on its first target, it is struggling with the second as the Consumer Price Index expanded at a rate of 7.7% in the year to October.

The central bank has identified the dynamic jobs market and non-stop growth in average hourly earnings of Americans as among reasons for such high inflation and has been trying to curb both with aggressive interest rate hikes.

The Fed has added 375 basis points to rates since March. Prior to that, rates peaked at just 25 basis points, as the central bank slashed them to nearly zero after the global outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic in March 2020.

Fed Chairman Jerome Powell said on Wednesday the central bank could start slowing down the pace of US rate hikes as early as December but won't stop its monetary tightening as inflation was still growing way above levels it desired.

After four straight jumbo-sized hikes of 75 basis points between June and November, markets expect the Fed to impose a smaller increase of 50 basis points at its upcoming rate decision on December 14.

But with November's non-farm payrolls growth again coming in some 32% higher than forecast, some economists wondered how comfortable the Fed would be in dropping the pace of its rate hikes.

"The wages number is a concern and could stoke second-round effects on inflation," economist Adam Button said in a commentary posted on the ForexLive forum.

The labor market has been the juggernaut of the US economy over the past two years, spearheading its recovery from the coronavirus pandemic.

Joblessness among Americans reached an all-time high of 14.8% in April 2020, with the loss of some 20 million jobs after the COVID-19 breakout. Since June 2020, however, the Labor Department's non-farm payrolls report has reported hundreds of thousands of job additions every month, with earnings growth keeping up a steady upbeat momentum too.

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US Announces Reduction in Anti-Personnel Landmine Use on 25th Anniversary of Ottawa Treaty

WASHINGTON, December 2 (Sputnik) - The United States will work to limit its use of anti-personnel landmines, National Security Council (NSC) spokesperson Adrienne Watson said on Friday in a statement marking the 25th anniversary since the signing of the Ottawa Treaty. "President Biden's commitment to reduce the impact of these weapons is being backed by action. We are reducing our reliance on anti-personnel landmines by directing excess weapons be removed from our inventories and positioned for demilitarization in accordance with verifiable timelines," Watson said.

She added that Washington is trying to continue to lead the world in eliminating "the lasting impact of these weapons."

"[The US] are contributing over \$4.7 billion in aid over the last two and a half decades in more than 100 countries for the safe clearance and destruction of landmines, explosive weapons, and conventional weapons," she said.

The Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention was opened for signature in Ottawa in 1997. So far, 164 countries around the world have acceded to the convention. The United States is not a party to the Ottawa Treaty.

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Canada Imposes New Sanctions on 4 People, 5 Entities in Iran – Global Affairs

WASHINGTON, December 2 (Sputnik) - Canada has imposed sanctions on an additional four people and five entities in Iran, according to a release.

"Canada will not stand idly by while the regime's human rights violations increase in scope and intensity against the Iranian people," the release from Global Affairs stated. "That is why we are imposing sanctions on an additional 4 Iranian individuals and 5 entities for their roles in the regime's gross and systematic human rights violations and actions that continue to threaten international peace and security."

The sanctioned individuals include Morteza Talaei, Second Brigadier General of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and former commander of Tehran's Law Enforcement Forces; Ali Ghanaatkar Mavardiani, a senior judge and prosecutor; Hassan Karami, commander of the Islamic Republic's Law Enforcement Forces Special Units; and Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi.

Among the sanctioned entities are Safiran Airport Services, a cargo and commercial airline that has helped transfer alleged Iranian-made Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV) to Russia; Baharestan Kish Company, a subsidiary of the IRGC Cooperative Foundation; Javan News

Agency; Paravar Pars Aerospace Engineering Services and Research Company; and Design and Manufacturing of Aircraft Engines Company (DAMA).

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US Adds 263,000 Jobs in November, Unemployment Rate Unchanged at 3.7% - Labor Dept.

WASHINGTON, December 2 (Sputnik) - The United States added 263,000 jobs in November, the Labor Department said Friday, reporting the smallest employment growth in a month since February 2021 but still above forecast levels that proved the tough job the country had in cooling a runaway jobs market that was feeding inflation.

The so-called non-farm payrolls growth for last month came in a shade higher than October's 261,000 jobs, keeping the unemployment rate unchanged at 3.7%. Economists polled by US media had forecast a jobs growth of 200,000. The Federal Reserve defines a jobless rate of 4% or below as maximum employment.

The Fed aims to ensure optimum job opportunities for Americans while keeping inflation at or around 2% per annum. While it has done exceedingly well on the first target, it is struggling with the second with the key Consumer Price Index growing at 7.7% in the year to October. The central bank has identified the dynamic jobs market and earnings growth of Americans as among reasons for such high inflation and has been trying to curb both with aggressive interest rate hikes.

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US Commerce Department Finds 4 Chinese Firms Circumvented Solar Cell Tariffs – Reports

WASHINGTON, December 2 (Sputnik) – The US Department of Commerce has found that four major Chinese solar-cell manufacturers avoided US tariffs by shipping their products from Southeast Asia, The Wall Street Journal reported, on Friday citing sources familiar with the investigation.

The probe, which was sparked by a complaint by San Jose solar module manufacturer Auxin Solar, found that four of eight Chinese companies under investigation did not comply with tariff rules. Preliminary findings indicate that products shipped by BYD (H.K.) Co., Canadian Solar International Ltd., Trina Solar Science & Technology (Thailand) Ltd., and Vina Solar Technology Co. were essentially Chinese-made before their final assembly took place in Southeast Asia. BYD ships products from Cambodia and would normally be subject to a 27% tariff rate. Canadian Solar ships from Thailand and would be subject to 16%. Trina, which ships from Thailand, and Vina, which ships from Vietnam, would each face a 254% tariff rate. These four companies account for more than half of US imports of solar cells, while the four Southeast Asia countries account for about 80% of imports.

The Commerce Department is expected to announce the preliminary findings Friday and release the final report in May after conducting on-site audits of the companies and holding a public consultation.

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Uvalde School Shooting Victims File \$27Bln Lawsuit Over Police Response - Filing

WASHINGTON, December 2 (Sputnik) - Uvalde, Texas authorities are being sued in a \$27 billion class action measure filed on behalf of those who sustained emotional and psychological damages for the failed police response during the Robb Elementary School massacre that left 19 students and two teachers dead.

The 59-page lawsuit, posted on classaction.org, said because of the "abject failure" of law enforcement the plaintiffs will be forced to endure indelible and forever-lasting trauma.

The lawsuit names the City of Uvalde's police department, the Texas Department of Public Safety, San Antonio Police Departments SWAT unit, the Uvalde's Sheriff's office, and the US Department of Homeland Security. The filing says the defendants "fundamentally strayed from conducting themselves in conformity with what they knew to be the well-established protocols and standards for responding to an active shooter."

The plaintiffs cited in the document include all students, student parents, teachers, and school support staff who were in attendance or had children in attendance at Uvalde Consolidated Independent School District's ("CISD") Robb Elementary School on May 24, 2022.

The actions of the police since the May 24 incident have been strongly criticized by the public and the media for the fact that officers waited for reinforcements for more than an hour and did not breach the classroom where a young man shot children and teachers with an assault rifle.

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Social Media Platform Parler Says Ye Will No Longer Buy Company - Statement

WASHINGTON, December 2 (Sputnik) - Parlement Technologies announced that American rap artist Ye, formerly known as Kanye West, will no longer acquire the social media company. In October, Parlement Technologies said it had reached an agreement in principle with Ye for the acquisition of its social media platform Parler, known for its lack of policing of right-wing opinions.

"In response to numerous media inquiries, Parlement Technologies would like to confirm that the company has mutually agreed with Ye to terminate the intent of sale of Parler," the company wrote on Twitter on Thursday. "This decision was made in the interest of both parties in mid-November."

Ye's Twitter account was blocked following "anti-Semitic" publications. However, his account was reinstated in mid-November after Elon Musk became Twitter's new owner and CEO. Parler, which describes itself as a free speech social platform, rose to prominence last year and proved popular among supporters of former US President Donald Trump, who was "canceled" on several platforms including Twitter. Parler attracted over 10 million users after the US presidential election but went offline in January 2021 as Google, Apple and Amazon suspended their services and accused it of hosting content that encourages violence.

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FCC Approves SpaceX's Request to Deploy 7,500 More Starlink Satellites - Order

WASHINGTON, December 2 (Sputnik) - The US Federal Communications Commission (FCC) issued an order approving SpaceX's request to deploy an additional 7,500 Starlink satellites. "Specifically, we grant SpaceX authority to construct, deploy, and operate up to 7,500 satellites operating at altitudes of 525, 530, and 535 km [kilometers] and inclinations of 53, 43, and 33 degrees, respectively, using frequencies in the Ku- and Ka-band," the FCC said in the order on Thursday.

However, the FCC deferred consideration of SpaceX's proposed use of E-band frequencies and tracking beacons in its satellites.

SpaceX seeks to operate a network of 29,988 non-geostationary orbit satellites for its Starlink constellation, which provide internet to areas with little to no access.

Starlink currently has some 3,500 Starlink satellites active in low-Earth orbit.

Starlink has been playing a key role in helping Ukraine's military to operate and communicate on the battlefield, however, in September, SpaceX sent a letter to the US Defense Department requesting funding for the Starlink systems in Ukraine, claiming it could no longer pay for the service out of pocket. Musk later withdrew the request.

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US Supreme Court Sets February Hearing to Review Biden's Student Loan Relief Program

WASHINGTON, December 2 (Sputnik) - The US Supreme Court scheduled a hearing in February to review President Joe Biden's student loan relief program, a court filing revealed. "Consideration of the application to vacate injunction presented to Justice Kavanaugh and by him referred to the Court is deferred pending oral argument. The application to vacate injunction is also treated as a petition for a writ of certiorari before judgment, and the petition is granted on the questions presented in the application. The Clerk is directed to establish a briefing schedule that will allow the case to be argued in the February 2023 argument session," the court said on Thursday.

White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre welcomed the Supreme Court's decision to hold a hearing to review the case, adding that the relief program is legal and supported by careful analysis conducted by the Biden administration's lawyers.

Student loan payments will remain paused while the Supreme Court resolves the case, Jean-Pierre added.

In September, six states challenged the Department of Education's plan to forgive up to \$20,000 in student debt depending on a borrower's circumstances. The Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals granted the states' request for a universal injunction on implementing the plan pending appeal of the case.

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UPDATE - US Designates AQIS, TTP Leaders as Global Terrorists - Blinken

(Updates headline, lead, adds background in para 6, edits throughout)

WASHINGTON, December 2 (Sputnik) - Secretary of State Antony Blinken said senior leaders of al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) (terrorist group banned in Russia) and Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) have been designated as global terrorists as part of US efforts to ensure these entities do not use Afghanistan as a platform to launch worldwide attacks.

"Yesterday, the Department of State designated four AQIS and TTP leaders as Specially Designated Global Terrorists (SDGTs) under Executive Order (EO) 13224, as amended, for their leadership roles in their respective groups," Blinken said in a press release on Thursday.

The designated individuals include Osama Mehmood and Atif Yahya Ghouri, the emir and deputy emir of AQIS, in addition to the head of the group's recruiting branch, Muhammad Maruf. The US also designated TTP Deputy Emir Qari Amjad, the statement said.

"As a result of these actions, all property and interests in property of those designated yesterday that are subject to US jurisdiction are blocked, and all US persons are generally prohibited from engaging in any transactions with them," Blinken said.

The US government remains committed to using its full set of counterterrorism tools to counter the threat posed by terrorist groups operating in Afghanistan, including al-Qaeda and TTP, Blinken added.

The Afghan Taliban as part of the exit accord with the US vowed not to host terror groups, however, a UN Security Council report earlier this year said the movement has failed to fully cut ties with al-Qaeda and TTP. Islamabad has also clashed with the Taliban government for allegedly providing safe haven for members of TTP, whose main goal is to topple the Pakistani government.

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Associate to US Congressman Sentenced to 11 Years After Pleading Guilty - Reports

WASHINGTON, December 2 (Sputnik) - Joel Greenberg, the former associate of US Congressman Matt Gaetz, has been sentenced to 11 years in prison on numerous charges, ABC News said.

Greenberg, who sources say agreed to cooperate in the federal probe into his associate Gaetz, was sentenced after pleading guilty to crimes ranging from wire fraud, identity theft, conspiracy to bribe a public official to sex trafficking a minor, the report said on Thursday.

The former Florida tax collector faced 33 federal charges when he went on trial in the spring of 2021, the report said.

The case became national news in the spring of 2021 after media reported that the investigation led to a federal probe that has been looking into whether Gaetz had had sex with a minor who Greenberg introduced him to.

Greenberg opted to cooperate with the government in several investigations, including the one into allegations against Gaetz, in order to avoid a lengthier sentence.

US corporate media reported that Judge Gregory Presnell said Greenberg had provided substantial cooperation to the government, more than he has seen in 22 years.

Gaetz has steadfastly and publicly maintained his innocence and has denied any wrongdoing.

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US Court Rejects Trump Effort to Block DOJ From Using Classified Records in Probe - Filing

WASHINGTON, December 2 (Sputnik) - A US appeals court terminated a special master review process that former President Donald Trump requested to block federal investigators from using classified records seized from his Florida residence in an active criminal probe, a court filing revealed.

"The law is clear. We cannot write a rule that allows any subject of a search warrant to block government investigations after the execution of the warrant. Nor can we write a rule that allows only former presidents to do so. Either approach would be a radical reordering of our caselaw limiting the federal courts' involvement in criminal investigations. And both would violate bedrock separation-of-powers limitations. Accordingly, we agree with the government that the district court improperly exercised equitable jurisdiction, and that dismissal of the entire proceeding is required," the 11th Circuit Appeals Court said in the court document.

In October, the US Supreme Court rejected Trump's effort to have a special master review classified documents seized from his Mar-a-Lago residence as part of a federal investigation and asked the appeals court to reject it as well.

The Justice Department is trying to determine whether or not it can prove Trump violated the Espionage Act, whether or not he illegally withheld national security secrets and if he lied about it and tried to obstruct the Justice Department investigation.

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US Designates 4 Al-Qaeda, Taliban Leaders as Global Terrorists - Blinken

WASHINGTON, December 2 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration has designated two leaders of al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) and two of the Tehrik i Taliban Pakistan (TTP) movement in Afghanistan as global terrorists, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a press release.

"Yesterday, the Department of State designated four AQIS and TTP leaders as Specially Designated Global Terrorists (SDGTs) under Executive Order (EO) 13224, as amended, for their leadership roles in their respective groups," Blinken said in his statement on Thursday.

The four individuals are Osama Mehmood, Atif Yahya Ghouri, Muhammad Maruf and Qari Amjad, the statement said.

"As a result of these actions, all property and interests in property of those designated yesterday that are subject to US jurisdiction are blocked, and all US persons are generally prohibited from engaging in any transactions with them," Blinken said.

The US government remains committed to using its full set of counterterrorism tools to counter the threat posed by terrorist groups operating in Afghanistan, including al-Qaeda and the Taliban, Blinken added.

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US Sentences Russian National to 46 Months in Prison for Internet Fraud – Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, December 2 (Sputnik) – A US district court in New York sentenced Russian citizen Taras Bevz to 46 months in prison for allegedly laundering more than a million dollars in proceeds of internet fraud, the US Justice Department said in a press release.

"Taras Ilyich Bevz, a citizen of Russia, was sentenced to 46 months in prison for laundering over a million dollars of proceeds of various internet frauds targeting dozens of U.S. citizens and companies. BEVZ was sentenced today by U.S. District Judge Naomi Reice Buchwald," the press release said on Thursday.

It is alleged that the defendant, upon his arrival to the United States in November 2019 on a tourist visa, registered two corporations in New York to use them to launder proceeds of his fraud scheme, the release said.

Between November 2019 and April 2021, Bevz laundered the proceeds of a hacking scheme and a vehicle fraud scheme operated by his co-conspirators, according to the release.

The hacking scheme involved compromising multiple bank accounts, while the vehicle fraud scheme targeted victims by means of internet ads for the sale of cars, motorcycles, and boats, that were never delivered to buyers.

Besides the prison term, the defendant was also ordered to pay \$1,044,924 in restitution and forfeit \$1,044,924, the release noted.

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US Awards Lockheed Martin \$430M In Contract for HIMARS, Support Services - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, December 2 (Sputnik) - The US military has awarded Lockheed Martin with a \$430 million contract for High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS) and support services, the Defense Department said.

"Lockheed Martin Corp., Grand Prairie, Texas, was awarded a \$430,930,711 fixed-price incentive contract for full-rate production of High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems and support services to satisfy an urgent need to support the Army and various Foreign Military Sales partners," the Defense Department said in a notice on Thursday.

The contract is estimated to be completed by December 31, 2025, the notice said.

The United States has delivered a number of HIMARS to Ukraine for use against Russia's special military operation, where they claim the weapon has been particularly effective.

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UNSC Condemns Attack on Children's Religious School in Afghanistan - Statement

UNITED NATIONS, December 2 (Sputnik) - The UN Security Council issued a statement to condemn the attack on a religious school in Afghanistan that resulted in the killing of at least 20 students and children and wounding dozen others.

"The members of the Security Council condemned in the strongest terms the heinous terrorist attack on innocent students and children at the religious school in Aybak, in the Samangan province, on 30 November," the statement said on Thursday.

The attack resulted in the deaths of at least 20 students and children, and a dozen wounded, the statement said.

The 15-member Security Council underscored the need to hold the perpetrators of the attacks accountable, the statement added.

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Train Derailment in Canada's Saskatchewan Causes Fire, Prompts Emergency Alert

WASHINGTON, December 2 (Sputnik) - A train derailment in Canada's Saskatchewan province has caused the closure of a highway and prompted an emission emergency alert after a fire broke out in the wreckage, the Highway Hotline said.

The Highway Hotline is a service provided by the Saskatchewan government that advises of real time travel alerts in the province.

"A train has derailed near Macoun, about 20km northwest of Estevan. This is a dangerous scene and fire is present. RCMP is rerouting traffic from Highway 39 and entrances to Macoun are blocked. Avoid the area if at all possible," the Highway Hotline said via Twitter on Thursday. The service added that visibility is significantly affected by smoke from the blaze and that delays of up to six hours should be expected if transiting through Highway 39.

In a separate tweet, Alert Ready, Canada's public alerting system issued a warning, asked residents living within a 2200-meters area of the accident to remain vigilant as they may be requested to evacuate the area.

"Please avoid highway 39," the alerting system said.

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US Imposes New North Korea Sanctions on 3 People - Treasury Dept.

(Updates with quote in para 2, more details in paras 3-7)

WASHINGTON, December 2 (Sputnik) - The United States has imposed new North Korea-related sanctions on three people in response to Pyongyang's latest ballistic missile test, the Treasury Department announced in a statement.

"The US Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) today sanctioned three individuals for being officials of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK). These individuals have provided support to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's (DPRK) development of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and ballistic missiles," the statement said on Thursday.

The sanctions target Jon Il Ho, Yu Jin, and Kim Su Gil, the Treasury said, noting that the European Union previously designated the three WPK officials on April 21 over their role in North Korea's ballistic missile program.

The US imposed Thursday's sanctions in coordination with South Korea and Japan, both of which announced similar designations.

North Korea on November 18 tested an intercontinental ballistic missile, marking its eight ICBM launch this year.

"This ICBM launch, along with the over 60 additional ballistic missile launches conducted by the DPRK in 2022, clearly violate multiple United Nations Security Council Resolutions (UNSCRs) and demonstrate a continued threat to international peace and security," the Treasury said.

As a result of the Treasury's actions, all property and interests belonging to the three individuals will be blocked in the United States, along with any entities owned by the officials.

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US Seeking to Shift Air Defense Systems From Middle East to Ukraine - Raytheon CEO

WASHINGTON, December 2 (Sputnik) - The United States is seeking to transfer a number of air defense systems from Middle Eastern countries to Ukraine within the next three to six months, Raytheon CEO Greg Hayes told Politico in an interview.

"There are National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile Systems (NASAMS) deployed across the Middle East, and some of our NATO allies and we are actually working with a couple of Middle Eastern countries that currently employ NASAMS and trying to direct those back up to Ukraine," Hayes was quoted as saying on Thursday.

The goal is to send the NASAMS to Ukraine and then the US would backfill the systems in the Middle East over the next two years, the report also said.

The Biden administration would have to approve the transfer of systems to Ukraine, the report added.

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US Senators Introduce Bill to Designate Russia's Wagner as Terror Organization - Statement

WASHINGTON, December 2 (Sputnik) - US Senators Roger Wicker and Ben Cardin said in a statement that they have introduced a bipartisan bill to designate Russia's Wagner Group, a private military company, as a foreign terrorist organization.

"[Wicker and Cardin] today introduced the Holding Accountable Russian Mercenaries (HARM) Act, bipartisan legislation that would require the Secretary of State to designate the Russian-based PMC Wagner Group as a foreign terrorist organization (FTO)," the statement said on Thursday.

A companion measure will also be introduced in the US House of Representatives, the statement said.

Cardin said in the statement that the Wagner Group has been linked to atrocities in Ukraine, Syria and Africa. The FTO designation would allow the US government to go after the group's financial assets and open it up to prosecution.

On Tuesday, US media reported that the Biden administration was also considering the designation on its own as part of an effort to hamper Wagner Group's presence in Africa, where they conduct counterterrorism operations.

In September, Russian businessman Yevgeny Prigozhin admitted to establishing Wagner Group in 2014. The US State Department offered in July up to a reward of up to \$10 million for information on alleged attempts by Prigozhin and the linked Internet Research Agency to interfere in US elections.

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El Salvador Seizes Ex-President Sanchez Ceren's \$1.27Mln Properties - Attorney General

WASHINGTON, December 2 (Sputnik) – The Salvadoran Attorney General's Office announced on Thursday the seizure of \$1.27 million worth of property from former President Salvador Sanchez Ceren.

"Today, @FGR_SV executes the seizure of a property, three vehicles and the immobilization of two bank accounts owned by former President Salvador Sanchez Ceren valued at \$1.275.107.41," the office tweeted.

The attorney general's office said it is prosecuting Sanchez Ceren, 16 employees of the former president's office and other individuals, for crimes related to money laundering and embezzlement of public funds committed between 2016-2019.

The attorney general added that those properties were also registered under the name of William Oswaldo-Vaquero Leon, the son-in-law of the former president.

"With this diligence, the process to recover the funds that were illegally stolen from the State, begins," the attorney's office said in another tweet.

Formerly a leader of the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) guerrilla during the Salvadoran Civil War, Sanchez Ceren served as President of El Salvador from 2014-2019.

In 2020, Sanchez Ceren fled to Nicaragua after President Nayib Bukele's crackdown on gangs and corruption. An order of capture has been issued against him for embezzlement.

In Nicaragua, Sanchez Ceren joins another "exiled" former president accused of corruption, Mauricio Funes. Both have maintained their innocence in the face of the allegations.

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US Senate Passes Resolution to Avert Costly Rail Strike, Sending Measure to Biden's Desk

WASHINGTON, December 2 (Sputnik) - The US Senate on Thursday passed a resolution to avert a nationwide rail strike that could cost the economy billions of dollars if not avoided, sending the measure to President Joe Biden's desk for signature.

Senators passed the resolution in a vote of 80-15, with 60 votes needed to advance it. The House passed the resolution yesterday in a vote of 290-137.

Senators rejected a concurrent resolution to guarantee seven days paid sick leave annually for rail workers as part of the labor deal. The House passed the measure, which Senator Bernie Sanders demanded a vote on, lest he attempt to block the resolution altogether.

The resolution compels a deal between rail workers and carriers to prevent a possible rail strike, which could cost the US economy \$2 billion per day, according to the Association of American Railroads.

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Many Countries Face Risk of Recession Next Year - World Bank's Malpass

WASHINGTON, December 2 (Sputnik) - "I think we have the risk of recessions in a lot of countries next year," said president of the World Bank Malpass at the Reuters Next Summit . Malpass also added that the challenge for developing countries, which he works with closely, is the risk that these recessions may be lengthy due to the fact that there's not a mechanism right now for the world to be providing capital, or for the countries experiencing recession to be attracting capital.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, December 2 (Sputnik) -

BIDEN-MACRON MEETING

- * US President Joe Biden said on Thursday after meeting with his French counterpart Emmanuel Macron that they committed to expand cooperation between the United States and France on civil nuclear energy.
- * Biden said after meeting with Macron that they had agreed to take action to enhance and safeguard supply chains, manufacturing and innovation on both sides of the Atlantic.
- * The United States and France agreed to resynchronize their approaches to address serious trade concerns European partners have expressed over the US Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), Macron said.
- * Biden and Macron said in a joint statement that the United States and France will promote bilateral trade and investments that support supply chain resilience and innovative industries such as aerospace, information technology and finance.
- * The leaders of the United States and France in a joint statement pledged to ensure Iran never gets a nuclear weapon and agreed to boost an international framework to counter Iranian missiles and drones.

PUTIN-MACRON CONTACTS

- * French President Emmanuel Macron said on Thursday that he will have a phone conversation with Russian President Vladimir Putin following his meeting with US President Joe Biden.
- * Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told Sputnik that Putin did not yet have phone conversation with Macron in his work plans.
- * Macron said that he will continue to talk to Putin and discussed earlier with his US counterpart Joe Biden in Washington that he is communicating with the Russian president.

UKRAINE CONFLICT

- * The United States and France on Thursday issued a joint statement saying they remain committed to addressing the effects of the conflict in Ukraine and to building resilience to disruptions of food and energy.

* The United States and France will coordinate with allies on assistance for Ukraine and aim to provide robust budget support to Kiev, US President Joe Biden and French President Emmanuel Macron said in a joint statement.

* West's attempts to create a "tribunal" for Ukraine are not legitimate, will not be accepted and will be condemned, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

GLOBAL ENERGY MARKETS

* The Parliament of Moldova at a meeting on Thursday approved the extension of the state of emergency over energy crisis for 60 days, starting from December 6, Parliament Speaker Igor Grosu said.

* Progress is being made toward locking in the Russian oil price cap before the December 5 deadline, Deputy Treasury Secretary Wally Adeyemo said.

* The United States and its partners have the ability to move the price cap on Russian oil below \$60 per barrel to constrain Moscow's revenues further, Adeyemo said.

* Gazprom's exports to non-CIS countries decreased by 44.5% year-on-year to 95.2 billion cubic meters of gas over 11 months, the Russian energy giant said.

* Global gas demand decreased by 55 billion cubic meters in 11 months, of which about 50 billion fell on the EU countries, Gazprom said.

PLANE CRASH IN ARMENIA

* At least two people were killed in a plane crash in Armenia, the ministry of emergency situations (EMERCOM) said on Thursday.

* The victims of a plane crash in Armenia were Russian citizens, press secretary of the Armenian Ministry of Emergency Situations Hayk Kostanyan told Sputnik.

SUSPICIOUS PARCELS IN SPAIN

* Spain's police have managed to intercept an envelope sent to Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez, which allegedly contained a "pyrotechnic substance," the Spanish Interior Ministry said on Thursday.

* Another parcel, presumably with explosives, was found at the US Embassy in Madrid, the building was cordoned off, Spanish broadcaster Sexta reported, citing the police.

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Pentagon Says Hopeful US Congress Can Pass Defense Funding Bill Before End of Year

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - Pentagon Press Secretary Pat Ryder said on Thursday that he is confident the US Congress can pass legislation to fund defense programs before the end of the year, as lawmakers push to quickly fund the government as well.

The Senate is slated to consider the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), which would provide approximately \$850 billion in funding for US defense programs, before the new class of lawmakers take office in January.

Congress is also seeking to pass a continuing resolution or omnibus funding bill for government operations in order to avoid a shutdown.

"We are hopeful that Congress can pass the NDAA before the end of the year," Ryder said during a press briefing.

The House passed the NDAA in July by a vote of 329-101, with the legislation now up for consideration in the Senate.

Congress is also seeking to pass a continuing resolution or new omnibus funding bill for government operations, without which a shutdown could begin after December 16, when current funding expires.

On Monday, US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin urged Congress to pass a full-year appropriations bill and not a continuing resolution. A long-term appropriations bill is needed for critical investments in military infrastructure and to compete with China, Austin said.

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US House to Vote Next Tuesday to Codify Same Sex Marriage Bill for Biden to Sign - Pelosi

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - Republicans and Democrats in both chambers of Congress are working to prepare the Respect for Marriage Act protecting same-sex marriage to be ready next Tuesday for a vote, outgoing House Speaker Nancy Pelosi told a Capitol Hill press conference on Thursday.

"The bill ensures [the encodement into law] of the same sex marriage act," Pelosi said. "It had strong bipartisan support in both the Senate and the House."

The legislation would ensure that the right to same-sex marriage for both men and women was codified into US law.

Pelosi said the legislation was one of the final bills she would sign as Speaker of the House before the new Republican majority took over control of the chamber as a result of their victory in November's midterm congressional elections.

The Senate passed the legislation on Tuesday as members of both parties cooperated to prevent the conservative-dominated Supreme Court from eliminating the right after it reversed the 50-year-old Roe vs Wade ruling last year, taking away the federal legal right to unlimited abortion.

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Canada Commits \$745,000 to International Court Probe of Sex Crimes After Accusing Russia

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) – The Canadian government has pledged C\$1 million (\$745,000) to the International Criminal Court probe into sexual and gender-based violence and

crimes around the world, Foreign Minister Melanie Joly announced on Thursday after putting forward new accusations against Russia during an OSCE meeting.

Ukraine has actively promoted allegations of sex crimes purportedly committed by Russian soldiers. In May, Ukraine dismissed its ombudswoman for human rights, Lyudmyla Denisova, with lawmakers, among other things, citing her unverifiable statements about alleged Russian sexual crimes "committed in an unnatural way" and the "rape of children."

"We cannot let the Russian regime escape international accountability. Today alongside @DmytroKuleba, I announced \$1 million in additional funding for the International Criminal Court to investigate conflict related sexual violence," Joly tweeted.

Speaking at the OSCE's Ministerial Council meeting earlier in the day, Joly said that Russia should be held accountable for its special military operation in Ukraine, and that Canada will continue its support for Kiev for as long as it takes.

Polish authorities, which are hosting the OSCE's Ministerial Council, barred Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov from physically attending the meeting, only allowing him to participate virtually.

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US Defense Chief Launches New Office of Strategic Capital to Bolster Tech Edge - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin established a new Office of Strategic Capital (OSC) to bolster the nation's technological advantage by connecting companies developing critical technologies to funding, the Pentagon said on Thursday.

"We are in a global competition for leadership in critical technologies, and the Office of Strategic Capital will help us win that competition and build enduring national security advantages," Austin said in a statement. "By working with the private capital markets and by partnering with our federal colleagues, OSC will address investment gaps and add a new tool to the Department's investment toolbox."

Critical technologies such as advanced materials, next-generation biotechnology and quantum science require long-term financing to bridge the gap between the laboratory and production, the Pentagon said.

Many of these technologies are essential for future defense capabilities but are not directly purchased by the Defense Department, meaning existing procurement programs are unable to support the companies' immediate capital needs, the Pentagon said.

OSC will be overseen by Austin and have an advisory panel that includes the Under Secretaries of Defense, according to the Pentagon. OSC will work across policy, acquisition and research to increase the amount of capital available to critical technology companies, the Pentagon said.

Additionally, OSC will help counter non-market actions by strategic competitors that use US capital markets to advance their own technology goals, the Pentagon said.

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US Approves Possible \$380Mln Sale of Stinger Man Portable Missiles to Finland - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - The United States approved the possible \$380 million sale of Stinger Man Portable missiles to Finland, the Pentagon said on Thursday.

"The State Department has made a determination approving a possible Foreign Military Sale to the Government of Finland of FIM-92K Stinger Man Portable missiles; Production Verification Flight Test (PVFT) FIM-92K Stinger Man Portable missiles; and related equipment for an estimated cost of \$380 million," the Pentagon said in a press release.

Finland requested to purchase 350 FIM-92K Stinger Man Portable missiles and five Production Verification Flight Test (PVFT) FIM-92K Stinger Man Portable missiles, the release said.

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US Imposes New Hezbollah-Related Sanctions on 3 People, 2 Entities - Treasury

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - The United States has imposed sanctions on three people and two entities in Lebanon over the alleged involvement in providing financial services and procuring weapons for Hezbollah, the Treasury Department said on Thursday.

"Today, the US Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) took action against two individuals and two companies based in Lebanon for providing financial services to Hizballah, along with an additional individual involved in facilitating weapons procurement for Hizballah," the Treasury Department said in a statement.

The financial services sanctions target Adel Mohamad Mansour and Naser Hasan Naser along with Al-Khobara for Accounting, Auditing, and Studies and Auditors for Accounting and Auditing. The Treasury also sanctions Hassan Khalil for allegedly "actively working to procure weapons" on behalf of Hezbollah.

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US Imposes New North Korea Sanctions on 3 People - Treasury Dept.

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - The United States has imposed new North Korea-related sanctions on three people after Pyongyang's latest missile tests, the Treasury Department announced in a statement on Thursday.

The sanctions target Il Ho Jon, Su Gil Kim and Jin Yu, the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control said in a notice on its website.

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US House May Fall Back on Continuing Resolution to Fund Government in Fiscal 2023 - Pelosi

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - Republicans and Democrats in the US House of Representatives are working to reach an agreement on the omnibus spending bill to fund the US government in the coming year, but if they fail, Congress will push through another stopgap continuing resolution of the kind it had to fall back on during the presidency of Barack Obama, outgoing House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said on Thursday.

"The Congress remains hard at work on the omnibus funding package," Pelosi told a news conference. "If they can't reach agreement we have no choice but [to seek] a continuing resolution. It would be a last resort but we have to have an agreement."

The continuing resolution would add or eliminate no measures but would maintain funding for all programs in the government at their current levels.

"The Republicans and Democrats [working] in a bipartisan way on the [US House] Appropriations Committee can reach a solution and we should let them do that but sadly we would have no choice if they cannot. Then we would have to have a yearlong CR [continuing resolution]," Pelosi said.

House Appropriations Committee members worked late into Wednesday night and renewed their talks on Thursday morning in their efforts to reach agreement on the new omnibus appropriations legislation, Pelosi added.

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Macron Says Will Continue to Speak to Putin, Informed Biden of Talks With Russian Leader
(Adds details in paras 3-5)

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - French President Emmanuel Macron said on Thursday that he will continue to talk to Russian President Vladimir Putin and discussed it with his US counterpart, Joe Biden, during their meeting in Washington.

"Indeed, I will continue to talk to President Putin and, as a matter of fact, we talked about it this morning with President Biden because we constantly try to prevent escalation and to get some very concrete results," Macron said at a joint press conference with Biden at the White House. The French president noted that he plans to address the security and safety of nuclear plants during the conversation with Putin.

Macron said earlier on Thursday that he will have a phone conversation with Putin after his meeting with Biden. He said that the conversation will take place in the coming days.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told Sputnik on Thursday that Putin did not yet have a phone conversation with Macron in his work plans.

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Ukraine Remains to Be in Focus for UN Security Council - Indian Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, December 1 (Sputnik) - Ukraine continues to be in the focus of the UN Security Council and meetings will also continue to take place on the situation there, Indian Ambassador to the United Nations Ruchira Kamboj said on Thursday.

"Ukraine is very much a focus matter in the Security Council and there will be meetings on Ukraine," Kamboj, who is presiding over the Security Council during the month of December, said.

The ambassador pointed out that India favors peace and dialogue, and will speak to both sides involved in the Ukraine conflict.

India assumed the presidency of the Group of Twenty (G20) most powerful industrial nations. The G20 is an intergovernmental forum comprised of 19 states and the European Union. The forum accounts for 85% of the global GDP, 75% of international trade and two-thirds of the world population. The G20 says it seeks to address major issues pertaining to the global economy, including international financial stability and sustainable development.

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Macron Says Will Continue to Talk to Putin, Informed Biden About Talks With Russian Leader

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - French President Emmanuel Macron said on Thursday that he will continue to talk to Russian President Vladimir Putin and discussed earlier with his US counterpart Joe Biden in Washington that he is communicating with the Russian president. "Indeed, I will continue to talk to President Putin and, as a matter of fact, we talked about it this morning with President Biden because we constantly try to prevent escalation and to get some very concrete results," Macron said.

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Biden Says Prepared to Talk to Putin If Sees Interest in Ending Ukraine Conflict

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Thursday he is prepared to talk to Russian President Vladimir Putin if there is an interest on the part of Moscow to end their special military operation in Ukraine.

"I'm prepared to speak with Mr. Putin. If in fact, there is an interest in him deciding ... [if] he's looking for a way to end the war. He hasn't done that yet," Biden said during a joint press conference with French President Emmanuel Macron. "I'm prepared if [Putin] he's willing to talk

to find out what he's willing to do, but I'll only do in consultation with my NATO allies, I'm not going to do it on my own."

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Artist Ye Says Likes Hitler, Loves Nazis Following Accusations of Anti-Semitism

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - Artist Ye, formerly known as Kanye West, said on Thursday that he likes Germany's Nazi leader Adolf Hitler and loves the Nazis after recent accusations of anti-Semitism against him.

"I like Hitler," Ye said during an interview with InfoWars. "I love Jewish people, but I also love Nazis."

Ye also said that he does not like the word "evil" when used next to Nazis, adding that every human being has value, "especially Hitler."

Ye appeared on InfoWars alongside controversial political commentator Nick Fuentes, who has similarly been accused of anti-Semitism.

In November, the two met with former President Donald Trump at Mar-a-Lago in Florida, sparking criticism of Trump by some Republicans.

Fuentes said during the interview that Ye offered Trump an opportunity to run with him in the 2024 presidential election. However, Trump told Ye that he could not win the election, Fuentes said.

Ye was accused of anti-Semitism for his comments about disproportionate Jewish representation in certain industries and for claiming that black people are the real Jews.

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Macron on American Inflation Reduction Act: US, France Agree to Resynchronize Approaches

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - The United States and France agreed to resynchronize their approaches to address serious trade concerns European partners have expressed over the US Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), French President Emmanuel Macron said on Thursday.

"We also had an excellent discussion on the IRA and the recent pieces of legislation adopted by the American administration ... we agreed to resynchronize our approaches," Macron said during a joint press conference with President Joe Biden at the White House.

Macron added that the United States and France tasked teams to continue close cooperation and coordination, especially with other European partners, to find solutions on trade issues identified over the IRA.

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Biden Says US, France Committed to Deepening Cooperation on Civil Nuclear Energy

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Thursday after meeting with his French counterpart Emmanuel Macron that they committed to expand cooperation between the United States and France on civil nuclear energy.

"Today, we also committed to deepening cooperation between France and United States on civil nuclear energy through our bilateral clean energy partnership," Biden said.

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Biden Says Agreed With Macron to Boost Supply Chains, Manufacturing, Innovation

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Thursday after meeting with his French counterpart Emmanuel Macron that they had agreed to take action to enhance and safeguard supply chains, manufacturing and innovation on both sides of the Atlantic.

"We agreed to discuss practical steps to coordinate and align our approaches so that we can strengthen and secure the supply chains, manufacturing, and innovation on both sides of the Atlantic," Biden said.

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Biden Says Had Detailed Discussion With Macron on Inflation Reduction Act

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden after a bilateral meeting with his French counterpart, Emmanuel Macron, on Thursday said that they had a detailed discussion on the Inflation Reduction Act.

"We had a detailed discussion on the Inflation Reduction Act... we did talk about that a good deal," Biden said at a joint press conference.

On Wednesday, Macron criticized the United States' trade policy at a meeting with US lawmakers, the France 24 broadcaster reported. He called the Inflation Reduction Act, a US domestic energy production investment and clean energy promotion policy, "super aggressive." Macron urged the United States to engage in closer trade coordination with Europe.

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US, France to Promote Trade, Investments That Support Supply Chain Resilience - Statement

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden and French President Emmanuel Macron said in a joint statement on Thursday that the United States and France will promote bilateral trade and investments that support supply chain resilience and innovative industries such as aerospace, information technology and finance.

"[The United States and France] continue to promote bilateral trade and investments that support supply chain resilience and our high-tech and innovative industries, including aerospace, information technology, pharmaceuticals, and finance," the statement said. The joint statement was issued shortly after the talks held between the two presidents in Washington.

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US, France Remain Committed to Addressing Effects of Ukraine Conflict - Joint Statement

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - The United States and France on Thursday issued a joint statement saying they remain committed to addressing the effects of the conflict in Ukraine and to building resilience to disruptions of food and energy.

"The United States and France remain committed to addressing the wider effects of Russia's war, including working with the international community to build greater resilience to food and energy disruptions," the joint statement said.

The joint statement was issued following talks between US President Joe Biden and French President Emmanuel Macron in Washington.

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US, France Determined to Ensure Iran Never Gets Nuclear Weapon – Statement

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) – The leaders of the United States and France in a joint statement on Thursday pledged to ensure Iran never gets a nuclear weapon and agreed to boost an international framework to counter Iranian missiles and drones.

"They [The United States and France] remain determined to ensure that Iran can never develop or acquire a nuclear weapon," the joint statement said. "They will undertake joint efforts aimed at further strengthening the international framework constraining the proliferation of Iranian missile and unmanned aerial vehicle technologies in the region and beyond..."

The statement comes following the talks between US President Joe Biden and French President Emmanuel Macron in Washington DC.

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US, France to Enhance Coordination on Maritime Security in Pacific - Statement

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - The United States and France will strengthen coordination on maritime security in the Pacific, and Washington will step up support for air and maritime deployments conducted by the European Union in the region, US President Joe Biden and French President Emmanuel Macron said in a joint statement on Thursday.

"The United States and France intend to expand their regional diplomatic, development, and economic engagement with a view to building resilience in the Pacific Islands. They also intend to increase practical coordination in the region on maritime security," the statement said. "The United States intends to increase its support and material contributions to air and maritime deployments conducted by France and other European nations in the region."

The statement comes following the talks between the two leaders in Washington DC.

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US, France to Coordinate With Allies on Ukraine Aid, Boost Budget Support - White House

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - The United States and France will coordinate with allies on assistance for Ukraine and aim to provide robust budget support to Kiev, US President Joe Biden and French President Emmanuel Macron said in a joint statement on Thursday.

"The United States and France plan to continue working with partners and allies to coordinate assistance efforts, including at the international conference taking place in Paris on December 13, 2022," the statement said. "They also intend to continue providing robust direct budget support for Ukraine, and to urge the international financial institutions to scale up their financial support."

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Biden, Macron Agree to Deepen Defense Cooperation on Critical Tech, Advanced Capabilities

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden and French President Emmanuel Macron said in a joint statement on Thursday that the two nations will enhance their defense cooperation on advanced capabilities and technologies vital to deterrence in the future.

"The Presidents intend to expand defense cooperation on advanced capabilities and key technologies that will be critical to deterrence and defense in the future," the statement said. The statement comes following the talks between the two leaders in Washington DC.

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US Inflation, Job Growth Indicators Ease, Paving Way for Smaller Fed Interest Rate Hikes

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - US inflation and job growth indicators are easing while the economy is expanding, paving the way for the Federal Reserve to adopt smaller interest rate hikes, economists said.

The inflation indicator Personal Consumption Expenditure (PCE) Index, closely tracked by the Fed, grew by an annual rate of 6% in October versus a 6.2% growth in the year to September, the US Commerce Department said on Thursday.

Jobs growth, which some have blamed for runaway inflation in the United States, has begun easing too.

US employers slashed 76,835 jobs in November, some 127% more than in October and five times more than a year ago, the private employment tracker Challenger, Gray & Christmas, Inc. said earlier on Thursday.

Prior to that, payrolls processor ADP said private sector employers in the United States created just about 127,000 jobs in November, the smallest in almost two years.

The labor market has been the juggernaut of the US economy over the past two years, spearheading its recovery from the coronavirus pandemic which broke out in 2020.

Joblessness among Americans reached an all-time high of 14.8% in April 2020, with the loss of some 20 million jobs after the COVID-19 breakout. Since then, the Labor Department's non-farm payrolls report has reported hundreds of thousands of job additions every month. The national jobless rate has remained for almost a year now at below the 4% level that the Federal Reserve defines as maximum employment. US average hourly earnings have also risen without stop since June 2021.

For November though, the trend may have begun to change, with the Labor Department expected to issue on Friday a non-farm payrolls report with only about 200,000 new jobs, in what would be the smallest monthly increase since December 2020.

The slowdown in the PCE and jobs growth came after Wednesday's data on Gross Domestic Product, which measures the economy, showed a 2.9% expansion in the third quarter, following a 1.6% contraction in the second quarter and 0.6% growth in the first quarter.

Inflation, measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI) expanded by 7.7% during the year to October, growing at its slowest pace of in nine months after peaking with a 9.1% growth during the 12 months to June.

The drop in inflation came after relentless interest rate hikes by the Fed, which has added 375 basis points to rates since March. Prior to that, rates peaked at just 25 basis points, as the central bank slashed them to nearly zero after the global COVID-19 outbreak.

Despite such aggressive rate hikes, inflation remains more than three times higher than levels preferred by the central bank, which has vowed to get the CPI back to its 2%-per-year target. The PCE number released on Thursday was, thus, welcomed by economists as a sign of further cooling in inflation.

Inflation "expectations adjusted lower after CPI and this report shows that wasn't a fluke," economist Adam Button said in a post on the ForexLive forum, referring to the PCE number. President Joe Biden also said on Thursday that the United States was advancing in its fight against inflation although it had a long way to go.

"We are seeing initial signs that we are making progress in tackling inflation, even as we make the transition to more steady, stable economic growth," Biden said in a statement released by the White House. "It will take time to bring inflation back to normal – and there could be setbacks along the way."

Fed Chairman Jerome Powell said on Wednesday the central bank could start slowing down the pace of US rate hikes as early as December but won't stop its monetary tightening as inflation was still growing way above levels it desired.

After four straight jumbo-sized hikes of 75 basis points between June and November, markets expect the Fed to impose a smaller increase of 50 basis points at its upcoming rate decision on December 14.

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Coinbase Says Apple Blocking Latest Wallet App Release, Desires 30% of NFT Gas Fees

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - Users are unable to access the latest version of cryptocurrency company Coinbase's wallet app on Apple devices after the tech company blocked its release until they receive 30% of gas fees used to transfer non-fungible tokens (NFTs), Coinbase said on Thursday.

"You might have noticed you can't send NFTs on Coinbase Wallet iOS anymore. This is because Apple blocked our last app release until we disabled the feature. Apple's claim is that the gas fees required to send NFTs need to be paid through their In-App Purchase system, so that they can collect 30% of the gas fee," Coinbase Wallet said via Twitter.

NFTs are unique identifiers of digital content that use the same blockchain technology as cryptocurrencies. The technology is often used to verify the authenticity and ownership of digital media and art. Gas fees are paid to validate transactions on the blockchain.

Coinbase said that Apple's proprietary In-App Purchase system does not support crypto technology, meaning the company could not comply with their request even if they tried. Apple's decision makes it more difficult for people who hold an NFT on an iPhone wallet to transfer the NFT, Coinbase said.

Coinbase added that it hopes the request is an "oversight on Apple's behalf" and opens up further conversations.

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Republicans to Introduce Bill Revoking Tax Breaks From Groups Investing in China - Reports

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - Republican members of Congress will introduce legislation to revoke the tax-exempt status from non-profit groups investing in Chinese companies, Daily Caller reported on Thursday.

Congressmen Mike Gallagher and Senator Josh Hawley will introduce the Dump Investments in Troublesome Communist Holdings (DITCH) Act, which would require non-profits to sell their holdings in companies based in China or with more than 10% Chinese ownership, the report said, citing a copy of the bill.

However, the bill allows organizations to apply for a waiver through the Treasury Department to keep Chinese assets if the threat posed to the United States is outweighed by their need to retain the asset, the report said.

Gallagher pointed out in a statement that tax-exempt entities investing in Chinese Communist Party-directed companies are not only profiting off of genocide, destroying the environment and financing the Chinese military's ability to build weapons that can kill Americans, but are also making US taxpayers unwittingly subsidize it, the report said.

Hawley also noted that the tax-exempt status given to universities, foundations and other entities is for their work promoting the US public good, while investing in China does the opposite by advancing Beijing's economic ambitions and military modernization, the report added.

The Biden administration in its most recent strategic assessment characterized China as the United States' pacing challenge on the world stage due to its ability to compete in a variety of areas and domains.

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Macron, Biden Exchange Gifts as French President Begins Official Visit to Washington

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - French President Emmanuel Macron and US President Joe Biden have exchanged gifts as Macron began his two-day official visit to Washington, according to a press pool report on Thursday.

"As the official gift, the President and Dr. Biden presented a custom mirror made of fallen wood from the White House grounds by an American furniture maker which is a reproduction of a mirror from the White House collection and hangs in the West Wing," the White House was cited as saying by the press pool report.

Biden also presented Macron with a custom vinyl record collection of US musicians and an archival facsimile print of Thomas Edison's 1877 patent of the American phonograph, while the

First Lady gave Macron's wife Brigitte a gold and emerald pendant necklace designed by a French-American designer, the report said.

Macron also presented gifts to the Bidens, including a vinyl record and a CD of the original soundtrack of Claude Lelouch's film "Un Homme et une Femme" (1966) by French composer Francis Lai. The Bidens have said they saw the film on their first date.

Macron also gave the Bidens a cup from the Christofle house in tribute to the era when Christofle crossed the Atlantic aboard the ship Normandie. The cup symbolizes the first links between France and the United States, the report said.

The cup integrates in the bottom a "Présidence de la République" lictor beam, the report added.

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Media Freedom Coalition Worried by Iran 'Violent Repression' of Protests – Joint Statement

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) – The Media Freedom Coalition (MFC) is worried by Iran's "violent repression" of the ongoing protests in the country, according to a joint statement issued on Thursday.

"We, the undersigned members of the Media Freedom Coalition (MFC) are highly concerned about the recent violent repression of freedoms of expression and peaceful assembly by Iran. We condemn in the strongest possible terms the ongoing crackdown by the Iranian authorities on protestors and society in general," the MFC statement reads.

The joint statement called on Tehran to abide by its commitments made under international law, the statement said, and to cooperate with UN's Special "Rapporteur" on the Human Rights situation in Iran.

MFC members call on Iranian authorities to release "arbitrarily" detained individuals, amongst them journalists reportedly arrested under the guise of prevention.

"The targeted arrests of journalists in Iran are a direct affront to freedom of expression and media freedom," the statement adds.

Furthermore, the MFC condemn Iran's accusation of independent media being "manipulated by foreign actors," the statement continues.

The MFC, whose members include representatives of the US, Canada, the UK and various other states from what is known as the "Collective West", urged Tehran to allow everyone free online-offline access to information.

Iran has been engulfed in massive social unrest since mid-September, after the death of Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old Kurdish woman whom protestors accuse the "morality police" of being responsible for.

Iran's government has repeatedly denied any form of involvement in her death, instead pointing the finger at foreign forces working to bring about a colour revolution in the country.

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Russian Embassy Accuses Canada of Spreading 'Anti-Historical Lies' About Soviet Famine

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - The Russian Embassy in Ottawa has criticized the Canadian government for spreading the Kiev-promoted narrative about the Soviet famine of the 1930s and portraying ethnic Ukrainians as the sole victims of the tragedy.

On Holodomor Memorial Day, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau issued a statement calling the Soviet famine of the 1930s, known in Ukraine as Holodomor, a "genocide against the Ukrainian people," which he says was "orchestrated" by Joseph Stalin to "impose total control over Ukraine, destroy the will of the people, and erase their identity."

"It's a shame that consecutive governments in Canada have chosen to believe in this disinformation not bothering to check the facts or consult serious researchers. More than that, by blindly supporting this narrative fed by the ultra-nationalist part of the Ukrainian diaspora, Ottawa also facilitates in further spreading anti-historical lies, to name it bluntly. It is inhumane and insulting to the memory of all victims of the 1930s Famine," the embassy said in a statement on Wednesday.

The embassy recalled that the mass famine of the 1930s affected not only Ukrainians, but also Russians, Belarusians, and Kazakhs, amongst others. The mission also pointed to the fact that the overwhelming majority of the victims in Ukraine were actually ethnic Russians "since the famine affected predominantly Russian-populated regions in the East and the South (Kharkov, Donetsk, Dnepropetrovsk, Odessa)."

The diplomats also noted that the ratio of the dead to the whole population is believed to have been the highest in Kazakhstan, among all peoples of the former Soviet Union.

The embassy reminded Ottawa that UNESCO in 2007, and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in 2010, rejected the concept of "Holodomor" as a "genocide of Ukrainians." Resolution 1723 PACE recognized that "millions of people in Belarus, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine lost their lives as a result of mass starvation," the statement also said.

With over 1.4 million Canadians claiming Ukrainian ancestry, the country is home to one of the biggest Ukrainian communities around the world. Many arrived in Canada along with Poles and Russians during the times of the Great Famine.

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Two in 5 Vaccinated Americans See No Need to Take COVID-19 'Booster' Shots - Poll

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - Forty percent of Americans, or two in five, who have been vaccinated for COVID-19 see no need to receive additional "booster" shots, a new Morning Consult poll revealed on Thursday.

"Among vaccinated adults who have so far skipped the bivalent booster targeting specific omicron variants, more than 2 in 5 said they didn't see a point in getting an additional vaccine, while a nearly equal share listed no longer being worried about COVID-19 as a major or minor reason for their resistance," a release on the poll said.

The share of Americans who still say they plan to get a booster vaccine has declined over the past two months and many who have so far resisted doing so say they are unconcerned about the disease as the virus has become endemic.

"[Fifty-three percent] of US adults say they will 'definitely' or 'probably' get a COVID-19 booster in the next year, down from 58% who said the same in a September survey," the release said. A similar drop has been reported among respondents' willingness to get an annual booster as 51% said they would "definitely" or "probably" get annual shots in the latest survey, down from 56%, the release added.

Americans no longer see COVID-19 as a problem, University of Minnesota School of Public Health Associate Professor Rebecca Wurtz told the Morning Consult.